

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-25

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INFO AMEMBASSY BONN

AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN

AMEMBASSY LONDON

AMEMBASSY OSLO

AMEMBASSY PARIS

AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE

USMISSION NATO BRUSSELS

USNMR SHAPE

USCINCEUR

CINCUSAFE

C O N F I D E N T I A L BRUSSELS 2447

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: MASS, NATO, BE

SUBJECT: REPLACEMENT AIRCRAFT FOR F-104GS

1. REPRESENTATIVES FROM BELGIUM, THE NETHERLANDS, NORWAY, AND DENMARK MET APRIL 23 IN THE OFFICES OF THE NORWEGIAN DELEGATION TO NATO IN ORDER TO PREPARE GROUND FOR A MAY 2 MEETING AT THE SAME LOCATION OF THE FOUR DEFENSE MINISTERS. BELGIUM WAS REPRESENTED BY FOREIGN OFFICE NATO AFFAIRS DIRECTOR VAN DE KERCKHOVE, LT. COL. LEFEBVRE, ASSISTANT CHEF DE CABINET TO MINISTER OF NATIONAL DEFENSE VANDEN BOEYNANTS, AND AN UNNAMED OFFICIAL FROM THE MINISTRY OF ECONOMIC AFFAIRS. NOBODY FROM THE BELGIAN AIR STAFF WAS PRESENT, ALTHOUGH THE OTHER COUNTRIES WERE REPRESENTED AT THIS LEVEL.

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2. LEFEBVRE TELLS US THAT THE PARTICIPANTS AT THE APRIL 23

MEETING DISCUSSED THE ECONOMIC NECESSITY OF COMMON SELECTION FOR THE F-104G REPLACEMENT BUT DID NOT ATTEMPT TO REACH ANY DECISION. RATHER, THEY WILL RECOMMEND THAT MINISTERS ON MAY 2 APPROVE THE ESTABLISHMENT OF A FOUR-COUNTRY WORKING GROUP CHARGED WITH QUICKLY NARROWING THE FIELD TO TWO OR THREE COMPLETING AIRCRAFT ACCEPTABLE TO ALL PARTIES. LEFEBVRE SAID THAT IT WAS AGREED THAT THE VARIOUS OFFERS AND AIRCRAFT HAD ALREADY BEEN STUDIED IN DEPTH AND THAT THERE WAS NO NEED FOR LENGTHY RE-EXAMINATION. THEREFORE, THE WORKING GROUP SHOULD BE ABLE TO ACCOMPLISH ITS TASK IN VERY SHORT ORDER, PROBABLY WITHIN A FEW WEEKS.

3. LEFEBVRE SAID THE BELGIANS ARE DETERMINED TO MAKE THEIR FINAL DECISION NOT LATER THAN MID-JULY, A DETERMINATION MADE NECESSARY BY THE NEED TO BEGIN REPLACING F-104GS IN 1978. HE BELIEVES THE DUTCH ARE EQUALLY INTENT ON REACHING A DECISION THIS SUMMER. THE DANES, HE SAID, APPARENTLY DON'T FEEL THE NEED TO REACH A DECISION UNTIL 1977, WHILE HE SUSPECTS THAT THE NORWEGIANS, WHO CANNOT AFFORD TO WAIT VERY LONG, MAY BE SEEKING A WAY TO SATISFY THEIR REQUIREMENTS WITH A LESS SOPHISTICATED AND LESS COSTLY AIRCRAFT. CONSEQUENTLY, LEFEBVRE IS SKEPTICAL ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF FORMING A FOUR-COUNTRY CONSORTIUM, ALL THE MORE SO BECAUSE NORWAY AND DENMARK HAVE LITTLE POTENTIAL FOR MAJOR INDUSTRIAL PARTICIPATION IN AIRCRAFT CONSTRUCTION.

4. WHEN ASKED WHETHER BELGIUM IS COMMITTED TO THE CONCEPT OF COMMON PROCUREMENT FOR THE F-104G REPLACEMENT, LEFEBVRE SAID THAT IT IS A MATTER OF ECONOMIC FEASIBILITY RATHER THAN DOCTRINE. BELGIUM'S POTENTIAL PURCHASE OF 117 AIRCRAFT IS SIMPLY NOT LARGE ENOUGH TO BRING THE PRICE PER PLANE DOWN TO A MANAGEABLE LEVEL. WITH THE ADDITION OF A SIMILAR BUY BY ANOTHER COUNTRY, I.E., THE NETHERLANDS, THE PROJECT WOULD BECOME ECONOMICALLY FEASIBLE. THE CONDITION COULD ALSO BE MET, LEFEBVRE SAID, IF THE COUNTRY SELLING THE AIRCRAFT DECIDED TO PURCHASE A SUFFICIENT NUMBER FOR ITS OWN USE. HE NOTED THAT THE BELGIANS HAD NO INDICATION AS YET THAT EITHER THE US OR FRANCE IS PLANNING TO BUY ANY OF THE COMPLETING AIRCRAFT. IF EITHER COUNTRY WERE TO BUY ONE OF THE AIRCRAFT, THIS WOULD HAVE A PROFOUND EFFECT ON THE BELGIAN DECISION.

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5. COMMENT. IT IS BECOMING MORE AND MORE APPARENT THAT, UNLESS THE FRENCH DECIDE TO PURCHASE THE SUPER F-1 THE DUTCH WILL EXERCISE THE DECISIVE LEVER ON THE BELGIAN DECISION. STRAUSS-HUPE

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